



Editorial

In certain categories of photography the notion of manufacturing a scene is anathema – travel, natural history or photojournalism, for example, are all expected to depict the objective ‘truth’ of the scene before the photographer. Such slippery ideas of truth in photography have waxed and waned ever since its invention. Fox Talbot was driven by his poor drawing skills to find a way of accurately depicting botanical specimens, but even he recognised the need to exercise artistic skill and judgement, and the value of the eye in recognising picture-worthy aspects that might not otherwise be noticed by others. These are just steps along a continuous path that leads to the deliberate staging of scenes to tell a story, to illustrate a concept or to advocate a viewpoint.

Four of the contributors to this issue of *Contemporary Photography* explicitly create the scenes they photograph. Julia Fullerton-Batten appeared in these pages in 2017 with her *Feral Children* project, so I have taken the opportunity this time to interview her on her motivation for adopting this approach in her meticulously staged *Old Father Thames* stories. Susana Sanromán and Andrea Juan are advocates for the protection of the environment and action on climate change; they use dramatic performances and installations to imprint their concepts on our minds. Maya-Inès Touam’s images are not dramatically staged, but as formally composed still lifes and the equivalent human portraits they show how similar objects, accoutrements and people can suggest different things depending on the observer’s cultural heritage.

By contrast, Marissa Roth’s images from Tibet are most definitely not staged, but show how the (subjective) eye can select small and fleeting elements in a scene that, together, evoke a longer period of time, a bigger place and a complex set of emotions. Ken Holland’s highly selective images have been included here because they also show wider scenes staged by others: they don’t just say ‘keep out’ in words but create an assemblage of fences, barriers, symbols and colours that say exactly the same thing without words!

Stories, ideas and emotions can be expressed in different ways: composed on a stage, reflected in multiple facets of the same thing, created in a sequence, or just recognised in the unintentional work of others.

Paul Ashley, Editor

Cover: © photo by Andrea Juan from her Antartica Project

Back cover: © photo by Marissa Roth from her Tibet series

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Contemporary Photography

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Deadline for the Spring 2019 issue is 1 March 2019.

Contemporary Group ethos - Photography that conveys ideas, stimulates thought and encourages interpretation; photographs 'about' rather than 'of'.

Present Imperfect, Future Tense

Susana Sanromán

Present Imperfect, Future Tense reflects on the importance of water for all animals. We as humans are comprised of around 60% water – we come from water, the planet is three quarters water, and water is essential in the quest for a habitable planet. My underwater project focuses on three major environmental problems that affect our oceans and, consequently, life on our planet: plastics, rising water levels and the melting of the ice sheets. The images recreate hypothetical scenarios of near-future realities. These fictitious narratives are based on statistical projections of the effects of climate change.

Vol. 1. Plastics. In this project, humans take centre stage as I express that we are not only responsible for the diminishing of healthy oceans but are also becoming victims, alongside the animals. Exploring the narrative where the oceans are full of plastics, the images in this series portray business professionals sinking whilst caught among the residues. They are expressed in a true paradox, as both victims and perpetrators. This phase delves into the effects caused by the drastic changes in consumption trends during the 20th century; As consumers, we moved from a limited consumption of goods of 'first necessity', to an exponential consumption of trivial goods. This drastic change in consumption triggers an exponential increase in the production of waste, and the problems that this entails: how to dispose of it. Through this idea and the series, I aim to increase awareness that oceans are the lifeblood, not only of the planet but of humankind.

Vol. 2. Atlantis. Rising sea levels are a well-documented threat facing modern society. They can have a considerable influence on human populations in coastal and island regions and natural environments like marine ecosystems. Experts predict that before 2050 thousands of small islands and millions of houses in coastal areas across Indonesia will disappear due to rising sea levels caused by climate change. In this part of the project, I re-create fictional near-future scenarios of submerged rooms, using a swimming pool to simulate inundated homes. I photographed Indonesian people under water, trying to escape from the flood.

Vol. 3. De-glaciation. This part of the project, in Greenland, is at the research, pre-production and funding stage.

See: www.susanasanroman.com



Page 5-7, photos from 'Plastics'







Page 8-9, photos from 'Atlantis'



Looking At The Arab World

Maya-Inès Touam, text by Séverine Grosjean

Maya-Inès Touam, a photographer born in France of Algerian parents, questions in her visual creations feminine power in the Arab world and our representations of Arab-Muslim societies. Maya-Inès is a woman from the Maghreb who speaks of and values Arab women, with their stories and many different forms of beauty. The Arab woman is a woman with 1001 faces, far from the clichés and stereotypes that we want to attach to her.

Some of the photographs of Maya-Inès are a collection of female stories in which the veil is at the centre of the work. She reveals as much a way to think of the veil as to wear it. Maya-Inès works as much with her patterns and textures as she does with the silhouettes of these women. This series of portraits goes beyond the theme of identity or debate on community. Maya-Inès represents the richness of a culture in which the woman remains the fundamental pillar. Everyone will look at these Arab women with the eyes of their own society and collective history. In an intimate and simple work, the photographer upsets individual mental boundaries. As a traditional object, the veil is the object-witness of a heritage anchored in the societies of the Mediterranean Basin and the Middle East. Not sacred or demonised, the look of Maya-Inès is devoid of prejudices. She encourages reflection. These photographs are a bridge nourishing a desire to transmit knowledge and her love of the East.

In her latest project, drawing inspiration from 17th century Flemish aesthetics, she creates contemporary compositions from traditional and also more modern crafts. In her still lifes, she diverts objects from their meaning. Mixing fantasy with poetry, she mixes symbolic objects and everyday Arabic objects. She questions her symbols and reveals habits of consumption. Natural elements or artifacts, they anchor the composition of which they are the object, in an identifiable temporality and geography. Through her compositions, staged and particularly aesthetic contemporary objects of everyday life, the artist questions the cultural representations of the East and the West. Thus Maya-Inès confronts, at the same time that she makes visible a multiple heritage tinged with folklore. Her artistic project is born of a vision, made concrete by a series of iconographic, semantic and symbolic research in the service of precise and balanced compositions. Through the staging of various cultural allusions, Maya-Inès Touam questions the predominance and the value given to the objects at the same time as she breaks down their symbolic power. She tries to question the representations of originality and cliché through objects that have a different symbolism on each side of the Mediterranean.

See: cargocollective.com/Maya-InesTouam











Antarctica Project

Andrea Juan

Since 2000 Andrea Juan has illuminated environmental concerns through her photographic work and installations using projections, fabrics and objects, created in the natural environments of Antarctica and other magnificent landscapes. Her Antarctica project is based on research on the impact of climate change. These studies address the consequences of receding glaciers, loss of mass of the Antarctic ice, the disappearance of Larsen ice shelves, the release into the atmosphere of methane gas (a potent greenhouse gas) and other factors that increase the atmospheric and ocean temperatures arising from global warming.

She found creating art in this environment to be deeply emotional; it was remarkable to experience new colours and unimaginable brightness. She needed to be ready to face unexpected extreme weather and the experience of being alone in a pristine and deserted space.

Andrea Juan experimented, and found through her artwork a new way of telling people about the results and conclusions of the scientific work. She made video installations and performances that were reflected in her photographic artwork, giving life to several series over the ten years that the Antarctica project has been running.

"To be in Antarctica is like to be a witness in another world but in this same planet. It is like launching into the inhospitable, towards a new place that does not compare with anything we know, without schedules, without currency, without the certainties of everyday life ... The light is so intense and bright that it modifies the colors throughout the day, while the outline of the horizon merges into a white plane in which the sun bounces to never hide ..."

The Antarctica Project series comprises:

- Solar Storm (2014)
- Organic (2013)
- New Eden (2012)
- New Species (2011)
- Invisible Forest (2009 / 2010)
- GeoRadar (2008)
- Metano (2006 / 2007)
- Red (2005)
- Proyecciones (Girasoles & Encapsulados) (2005)

See: www.andreajuan.net



Invisible Forest



Metano



Nuevas Especies II



Nuevas Especies VII



Nuevo Eden



GeoRadar



Solar Storm

Old Father Thames

An interview with Julia Fullerton-Batten

Paul Ashley: *Old Father Thames* is full of stories, and this is characteristic of much of your other work. Sometimes they are real (*Feral Children*) and sometimes imagined (*A Testament to Love*). Staging them as performance stills brings out the narrative very strongly. What is it that draws you to this approach?

Julia Fullerton-Batten: Story telling is my style of photography. Prior to *Old Father Thames* I would choose a single subject matter and convert it into a visual narrative comprising ten to fifteen images. My first project *Teenage Stories* was a series of stories about the trials and tribulations of a pre-pubescent teen girl becoming a teenager. This was followed by sequel projects addressing further stages of her progress to womanhood, concluding with *A Testament to Love*, concerning tales of unrequited love. *Feral Children* deals with the stories of a number of historical cases of feral children, whereas *Unadorned* is a social commentary on society's preoccupation with the ideal figure, weight consciousness, etc.

Compared with those earlier works there is less coherence between the stories in *Old Father Thames*. The only thread binding the individual stories is that they are centred around the River Thames; otherwise they are independent of each other – capsules of history, traditions and customs along the entire length of the Thames. Another major difference between this and my earlier projects is that the latter were figments of my own imagination. I could find locations and invent



Sweet Message in a Bottle



Lady of Shalott

settings to match my own ideas about the content of the image. With *Old Father Thames* I'm trying to make the images as authentic as possible and that constrains me to be factual, even if it's sometimes difficult when London's modern architecture forms the background for a centuries' old scene!

PA: How do you pick stories? Are you trying to complete a geographical (source to sea) or historical sequence? Or is it just chance encounters? You write that *Old Father Thames* is unfinished; do you have particular stories you want to add?

JF-B: Once I had the inspiration for the project I started off with a few months of research, reading books, attending talks, visits to art galleries and the cinema or watching videos, all of which are my customary sources of inspiration and information, inspired also by the paintings of the London stretch of the Thames by Monet, Turner, Whistler, and the Pre-Raphaelites. I even took up rowing along the river!

I soon developed a quick list of about twenty potential candidates to include in the project. Some of the more difficult ones I put on the back-burner. Others I had to drop because of the difficulty of getting permission from the London Port Authority to shoot the scenes on location on the Thames.

I started by shooting some of the easier ones – *The Race Box* and *Sweet Message in a Bottle* – before graduating onto the bigger sets, including reproducing John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* and John William Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shalott*.



Ophelia



The Race Box

The Ladies Bridge was also a massive production, but my next image, *1814 Ice Fair on the Thames*, presently a work in progress could be even larger.

A typical 'back-burner' case is my idea to shoot the interior of a prison hulk with prisoners in chains. This form of imprisonment was common practice after 1776 when the American Revolution stopped the sending of convicts to North America and from 1786 they served as temporary jails for convicts going to Australia.

PA: Where do you find your models? How do you get them to perform in a way that completes your vision of the story?

JF-B: Casting is central to my image making. I always spend a lot of time and effort finding the right person for a role in my images. They range from professional performers to street-cast people. Apart from physical features, not necessarily beauty, I look for models with a blend of personality, wide ranging facial expressions and acting ability.

I always meet my candidate models personally. In that way I can learn more about them than the impression I get from a few photos and a written profile. It also gives me the opportunity to brief them on what I hope we can achieve together, and to judge their degree of engagement and empathy with the role. I find that I can relate very well with talent with whom I get on well during our meeting.

On set I treat my models as actors. I give the talent the story to tell and provoke situations in which they can immerse themselves. I then stand back, observe and occasionally guide them so that we capture the realism I'm aiming for, then I press the release.

PA: Just a couple of practical questions to end with! How long have you been working on 'Old Father Thames'? How much time does each story take from idea to finished image, both in planning and in shooting?

JF-B: My fascination with the River Thames started when I moved to England from Germany and ended up living in Oxford. There the Thames passes through the city but is

called Isis (an ancient name for the Thames). I was sixteen at the time and Oxford was an engaging place for me to be. During my six-year stay there I studied photography and subsequently became an assistant for five years to a wide range of professional photographers. Shortly after starting my professional career in 2000 I moved to West London with my partner, now my husband. I once again found myself on the banks of the Thames, this time in Chiswick, where we still live.

Fast forward to a weekend about three years ago when my boys, idly playing on the floor, professed to be bored. I got them to put on their wellington boots and took them down to the foreshore of the river where they threw stones into the water and did a bit of mud-larking. It was then that I realised that I wanted to turn my long-standing fascination with the river into a project. So, my collection of stories in *Old Father Thames* is the culmination of many years of my fascination with the river.

I mentioned earlier that I did basic research on potential stories. But these needed an in-depth research for me to make my stories as authentic as possible. This included precise details of the event, the exact location, the period of clothing and props, and a thousand and one other important aspects that only came to light when doing the research.

That the Thames for much of its length is both tidal and a 'working' river imposed above normal considerations for shoots just up-stream from London down to the Thames Estuary (*The Grain Tower*). Especially time-consuming was the necessity to get permission variously from the Port of London Authority, the Crown Estate and local and county councils to shoot at many of the locations.

The final part of the planning phase leading up to the day of the shoot included choosing and hiring models, stylists, clothing and props, additional lighting and other equipment, and importantly making sure that my trusty crew members were available, ending up with arranging all the logistics to get everything and everybody on location on the day of the shoot.

The research and planning phase was the most complex part of creating an image. For some shoots this took a few weeks, for others a few months. On the other hand, the dates for some stories were pre-determined by the time of the year that the 'happening' actually took place; for example, Swan Upping is always held very precisely on the Monday of the third week in July and Durga Puja is held annually in September or October.

Normally on the day of shooting the images of prior projects I knew that everything had been meticulously prepared so that I could concentrate on getting the perfect shot, making it more often than not a relaxed affair. Not so with shoots on the tidal parts of the River Thames. Here we had a maximum of six hours to place all the equipment, props and models on the foreshore, take the ideal shot and then remove everybody and everything again before the tide turns. On top of that there are lots of health and safety considerations and I'm obliged by the authorities to start the day off by telling everybody about the precautions.

Upstream locations are often found by my assistants and I waist deep in the water, wearing waders, precariously balancing camera and tethered laptop and screen on tripods and hoisting lighting equipment around.

The project has been full-on for the best part of three years now. But how worthwhile it's been!



The Ladies Bridge



Mudlarkers



Grain Tower



Baptism



Swan Uppers



Durga Idol Immersion

Tibet – Infinite Light

Marissa Roth

When I'm asked the question, which is my favorite place that I've ever been to in all of my global travels, I answer without hesitation, Tibet. It doesn't mean that I discriminate against other places where I've had remarkable experiences or loved, such as The Philippines, or Japan, it's just that it's different with Tibet.

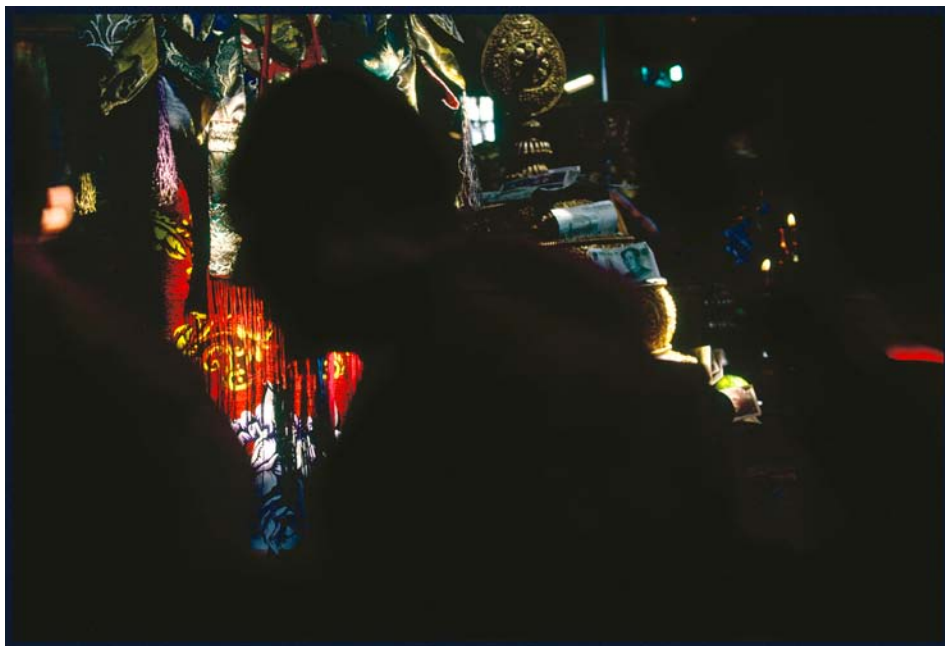
Tibet is the place that inhabits my heart, that I always carry with me, both in the memories of being there geographically, and through the transformative spiritual and almost metaphysical experiences that informed my photography on my two trips there. It's also the only place where I wept inconsolably the morning of my departure at the end of the second trip, as I knew intuitively that I would never return.

Before I left on my first journey there, I had what I can only describe as a vision, which was to create a linear visual sentence of images that would unfold in a color sequence akin to the colors of Tibetan prayer flags. Nothing like this had ever occurred for me; typically I am reactive to my environment as a starting place for my work.

Up until that point, most of my personal photography was in black and white, but in Tibet I chose to photograph with the last of the Kodachrome film. I knew that the deep reds of the monasteries and monks' and nuns' robes would sing with this medium, but that the subtle colors of the stones and landscape would be tonally quiet. And this film rendered the truest photographic black. It is this contradiction and duality that I continually search for and respond to visually, as I believe that they are the seen metaphors for all that exists.

From the first hours of my being there on both trips, I was awed by the clarity and vibrancy of the high-altitude light, where everything appeared in sharp focus, as there was very little moisture in the air to diffuse edges. The colors were bold and determined, almost calling out to be seen and braided with the physical experience of being there.

In particular, there was one afternoon during the first trip where I felt as if time stopped, that the earth wasn't turning, and those few precious afternoon hours would be eternal. It was at the residence of the 10th Panchen Lama in Shigatse, and I was sitting under an old apple tree in the stillness of a garden engulfed in transparent warm yellow



light. The only visible movement came from backlit gnats as they hovered, jaggedly catching the vibrant May sunlight.

Inside the monasteries and nunnery, that same light would unexpectedly enter into the centuries old darkened interiors through doorways, windows and cracks, and for a fleeting moment would catch on a face or a burgundy robe, illuminating color and chance.

Tibet has become a state of mind for me. I am often drawn to the memory of that afternoon in the garden, which I never photographed yet retain indelibly in my mind's eye. It is my visual imprint alone, not to be shared through an actual image for others to behold. I remember thinking about making a photograph as I sat there in that languid liquid light, but there was nothing to fix my composition on, no bold graphic elements or dramatic beams of light or shadows, or people or objects. It was just a pure feeling that could never be captured with film.

Tibet and the Tibetans inform my equanimity and inner peace when the tumult of the western world overtakes me on occasion. *Infinite Light: A Photographic Meditation on Tibet*, is my resulting book and traveling exhibition from my trips there. The book is not an overt political statement, nor is it a denial of the acute struggles that Tibetans have faced for decades as they were forced into diaspora.

It is my love letter to Tibet, and a very personal study through photographic images of what it feels like to be there. In honor of Tibetan New Year, Losar, February 5th–7th, 2019, I have chosen this portfolio of images to share with the *RPS Contemporary Group Journal*.

See: marissarothphotography.com, tibetinfinitelight.com









It's A Free Country - Or Is It?

Ken Holland ARPS

In the western world we celebrate the fact that we live in a free society. We can say what we like, go where we wish and live our lives without restriction or hindrance.

I recently spent almost three weeks in India: mostly in the state of Assam (where tourism is very much in its infancy), and also in the vast city of Kolkata. I was fortunate to stay with an Assamese family (now happily related through our lovely daughter-in-law) and experience day to day life in a small unassuming town. I travelled through other small townships using local transport, and made several crossings of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers on the government ferries.

After my return to the UK, one of the many things that struck me was how relatively free and unfettered things were in India. I don't remember seeing 'keep out' signs, or warnings of danger. Some ferries had no safety rails: you were expected to take care of your own safety. Dangerous old buildings and building sites were not surrounded by fences or notices requiring you to wear a hard hat. It was obvious they were dangerous and you had to be careful. Children had to learn that for themselves.

So, I wondered, is our western society really as free as we think it is? And does our obsession with safety notices and restrictive signs make us any more free? Does our dependence on safety warnings make us any more liberated as individuals? Perhaps more reliance on our own common sense and instinct for danger would make us stronger and less inhibited. Are we losing the basic skills of recognising danger for ourselves?





Per Strada, by Guido Guidi

Book Review by Christopher Morris ARPS

The Italian photographer Guido Guidi has been documenting the landscape of north-eastern Italy for decades. This publication (MACK, 2018) contains a selection of his photographs from the period 1980–1994, all made along the Via Emilia, an ancient route between Milan and the Adriatic.

In residential, commercial, agricultural and industrial scenes, Guidi has documented the region around his home in a manner that eschews any hint of glamour or exploitation. There is an overwhelming objectivity and honesty throughout.

Guidi studied architecture and industrial design, and his fascination with perspective is evident in many of his pictures. The publication includes an interview with Antonello Frongia and Andrea Simi where Guidi talks eloquently of the influences on his work and his views on the place of photography in the history of art.

These are subtly beautiful images, with the ineffable quality that only large format analogue colour photography can offer. Looking at these books (there are three volumes in an elegant slipcase) I find an elegiac, almost filmic feel that brings to my mind some of the classic Italian films of the 1970s, like *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (Rosi, 1979) and *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* (Olm, 1978). They are the very antithesis of modern high-impact digital images; these are pictures to spend time with.



View From The Chair

Avril Harris ARPS

This will be my final year as Chair of the Contemporary Group as I will be standing down at the next AGM. I have asked Alan Cameron if he would take the position of Chair as Peter, who has been my deputy, is also standing down. Alan has accepted, for which I am very grateful. I hope you will all give him the support which I have had from you over the years.

Our speaker at the AGM, Paola Leonardi, was most interesting and it is a great pity that more did not attend to hear her. She was a treat: the stories she told that accompanied her pictures were both funny and sad. Her subject was, to me, unusual – travelling the country borderlines of Europe on foot to investigate the effect of conflict on, mainly, women in these areas. Those who attended all agreed that it had been a very good day.

It has been decided that we will try to have future events centred on the Contemporary local groups (in North West, North, South West, East Anglia and now East Midlands) to which all members will be invited, and the region will be supported by the Contemporary Group. It may also be a way of introducing members to the groups and having exhibitions of your work, as well as discussing work in progress. We now have four established groups, and Howard Fisher has started a group in the East Midlands which I hope will be well supported. If interested, please contact either myself or Howard. Email addresses can be found at the back of this journal.

I am hoping that if events are organised by CG regions the load will be spread and the opportunity to have more events will be realised. Over the past few years we have had 47 prestigious photographers, lecturers and curators speak to us; many have become Hon FRPS and some of them have appeared in the RPS's final *Hundred Heroines Women Photographers*.

I have enjoyed my time with the Contemporary Group and the committee, but after 14 years I think it is high time I made way for others.

GROUP AND RELATED SOCIETY EVENTS

- 2 March Contemporary North West meeting at Samlesbury War Memorial Hall, Cuerdle Lane, Preston. PR5 0UY. 1-4pm. Contact Alan Cameron, alan.cameron@me.com tel 07825 271344
- 16 March Contemporary North meeting at Clements Hall, Nunthorpe Road, York. YO23 18W. 1.30-5pm. Contact Patricia Ruddle ARPS patriciaruddle@btinternet.com tel 01904 783850
- 24 March Contemporary South West meeting at Carnon Downs village hall, Tregye Road, Carnon Downs, near Truro TR3 6GH, 10.30am to 4pm. Please bring your own lunch (tea and coffee will be provided). Car parking £5. Contact Rod Fry rod@rodfr.eclipse.co.uk tel 01803 844721
- 30 March East Midland Contemporary Group (first meeting), 2-5 pm. Speaker: Mark Phillips ARPS (Chair of the Documentary group). Keyworth Methodist Church Hall, Selby Lane, Keyworth NG12 5AH. Contact Howard Fisher: email handjaf@virginmedia.com; tel. 0115 9372898.
- 30 March A Day with Magnum Photographer Martin Parr HonFRPS, 10 am to 4 pm. Saundersfoot Regency Hall, King George V Playing Fields, Milford Street, Saundersfoot SA69 9NG. See RPS website for reservations.
- 17 April Associate and Fellowship assessments, Conceptual and Contemporary. Royal Photographic Society, 337-340 Paintworks, Arncliffe, Bristol BS4 3AR
- 25 May East Midland Contemporary Group meeting, 2-5 pm. Keyworth Methodist Church Hall, Selby Lane, Keyworth NG12 5AH. Contact Howard Fisher: email handjaf@virginmedia.com; tel. 0115 9372898.

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